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RUEHMC/AMCONSUL MONTERREY PRIORITY 0028  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 0077  
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HAVANA 000285

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STATE DEPT FOR WHA/CCA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/21/2017

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [SOCI](#) [CU](#)

SUBJECT: CUBAN THUGS CONFRONT "LADIES IN WHITE"

REF: A. HAVANA 272

[1](#)B. EMAIL 3/20 WIEGAND/MADISON

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Classified By: COM Michael E. Parmly for Reason 1.4(d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: A Cuban Government-directed mob of at least 100 communist militants and State Security agents confronted the "Ladies in White" as they marched through Havana on March 20, the last of four days of activities to commemorate the 2003 "Black Spring" crackdown. At least three Ladies were shoved and more than a dozen had fliers ripped out of their hands, but none was injured. The confrontation, witnessed by reporters, lasted half an hour and followed a visit by 25 Ladies to the headquarters of Cuba's prison authority, in front of which they released doves and called for the liberation of political prisoners. Despite the March 20 confrontation and a smaller one at Central Park the previous day, the Ladies in White are delighted with recent developments and say ordinary Cubans are increasingly identifying with them and showing support. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Cuba's "Ladies in White," relatives of the 75 activists imprisoned in 2003, continued to publicly demonstrate in defiance of the regime on March 20. Leading Ladies Bertha Soler and Alejandrina Garcia told USINT that at 4 pm, 25 Ladies started a half-hour march through one of Havana's most people-heavy intersections (near the "Coppelia" ice-cream park) to the country's prison authority. Five uniformed Interior Ministry employees stood silently outside the building, and Leading Lady Laura Pollan addressed them: "We are here to request, once again, freedom for our husbands. We aren't going to hand you anything written; we're going to raise our voices." At this point the "Damas" started 15 minutes of a single chant: "Libertad!" The State Security presence was heavy but distant, with most officials watching from parked cars. Between 80 and 100 neighbors and passers-by looked on, "too afraid to support us in the presence of regime officials," said Garcia.

BLOCKING THE WAY, HURLING INSULTS

[1](#)3. (C) In the absence of any GOC response, the Ladies started walking back to Pollan's house in central Havana. This time they took a different route, past the University of Havana. Near the university's front steps, the Damas encountered a crowd of 100 to 120 people in civilian clothes, mostly men, a combination of State Security operatives and members of the

Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) and the Communist Youth League (UJC). The counter-protesters blocked the Damas' path and hurled insults. "Mercenaries!" "Your fliers are only good as toilet paper!" "Go to USINT and collect your five dollars!" Afro-Cuban Ladies were singled out for special treatment by Afro-Cuban counter-protesters, including "Blacks in the U.S. have no rights!" and other refrains. The insults flew for five minutes, during which the Ladies repeated their mantra: "Libertad! Libertad!" The counter-protestors then stayed with them as they walked back to Pollan's house.

#### MOB GETS MORE PHYSICAL

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¶4. (C) As the return trip continued, the mob's behavior grew more physical and intimidating. Counter-protestors roughly grabbed fliers from the hands of Damas. State Security agents appeared to rein in the more gung-ho militants from striking the Ladies. The mob's chants turned to "Traitors!" "Down with the empire!" "Down with imperialism!" According to Garcia, three foreign reporters, one equipped with a videocamera, recorded the action, at which point many of the younger counter-protestors drifted away, as if camera-shy. By the time the Ladies reached Pollan's home, the number of counter-protestors had dropped to around 50. As the Damas entered Pollan's narrow doorway one by one, at least three were shoved, including Georgina Noa, the wife of Margarito Broche. Counter-protesters tried to shove Gisela Delgado, head of the Independent Library Project, but she evaded contact. One counter-protestor reached into Laura Pollan's handbag, withdrew a stack of fliers and ripped them to pieces.

¶5. (C) The Ladies' march to the prison authority represented a last-minute decision not to march to Revolution Plaza. A March 18 walk near the Plaza prompted the Cuban Government to block their path, using dozens of officials and 16 vehicles,

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including marked police cars.

#### BUSY FOUR-DAY PERIOD

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¶6. (C) The Damas are ecstatic over the events of recent days:

- March 17: March down the Malecon waterfront;
- March 18: Post-mass march down Fifth Avenue;
- March 18: Participation in USINT-facilitated videoconference with former political prisoners in Miami;
- March 18: Evening mass for deceased 75er Miguel Valdes Tamayo;
- March 18: Confrontation with security forces near Revolution Plaza (reftel);
- March 19: March to Central Park (ref Email), and confrontation with dozens of GOC-directed counter-protesters in front of a statue of founding father Jose Marti;
- March 20: March to the prison authority;
- March 20: Confrontation in front of university, where Fidel Castro studied law.

¶7. (C) The Ladies are physically exhausted from four days of long walks, but feel they have connected with the Cuban people in a closer way than ever before. On one day of marching, we heard, the Damas received more than 100 gladiolas, their signature flower, from supporters in the streets. Many told the Ladies they had seen them on TV. The Ladies say they note a growing distaste among Cubans for the militants and State Security agents used to manufacture an opposition to the Ladies.

#### COMMENT

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¶8. (C) The unjammable "Radio Bemba" (word of mouth) is spreading news of the Damas' courageous walks throughout the island, despite the regime's attempt to intimidate them. In

the process, the Ladies' profile among ordinary Cubans is rising sharply. In our view, three incidents over the past 96 hours were of particular interest. One is the participation of the Italian Parliamentarians in the Damas' march down Fifth Avenue. In a statement released on March 18, they made clear that they joined the march not only to support all pro-democracy advocates, but to seek the liberation of Francisco Chaviano, a political prisoner whose incarceration predates those of the 75ers. Two, it was telling that the GOC used police vehicles and a senior State Security official to block the Damas' progress near Revolution Plaza, rather than simply sending in militant thugs or State Security agents posing as civilians. And three, we noted with interest that State Security operatives within anti-Dama mobs appeared to rein in the more violence-minded militants. If accurate, this would suggest that the GOC recognizes the inherent danger to the regime, in the event that a Dama were seriously injured.

PARMLY